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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines the effect of teacher expectations on minority students, and especially on Mexican-American students. The review focuses on four areas: (1) teachers' attitudes and expectations toward Mexican-American children; (2) teachers' attitudes and expectations toward minority children; (3) teachers' performance expectations of students; and (4) other expectations which determine teacher behavior. The research indicates that teachers do not expect Mexican-American children or minority children as a group to excel in school; that Mexican-American children lead double lives--family atmosphere and values are in conflict with the school environment and Caucasian values; and that school districts appear to lack a commitment to the Mexican-American student, thereby allowing institutional racism and racial bias to flourish. In order to develop insight and awareness to counteract the negative expectations of teachers, it is recommended that boards of education, community groups, district administrators, and government agencies make a commitment to develop and implement programs that are sensitive to the needs of Mexican-American children; and that teachers be trained and made more aware of the vast influence that their attitudes and prejudices have on pupils. (Contains 31 references.) (LL)

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The Effect of Teachers' Expectations on Mexican-American Students

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Running head: TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS

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School is central in children's lives, and it affects every aspect of their development. However, child care professionals and educators often disagree on how school can best enhance children's development (Papalia & Olds, 1992). The general achievement of a child in school depends upon a number of factors, including the nature of the school experience, the child's home, and the student's personal characteristics (Kaplan, 1988).

McCandless (1967) has aptly stated that "parents set the stage, but the play is acted out with peers, teachers, and bosses. For teachers, the job is to see that the play is acted out so that the actors are not destroyed." According to Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), the poor performance of a disadvantaged child in the school is usually attributed to his membership in a disadvantaged group. They believed that a child of minority background encounters poor academic success due to expectations held about him or her. They also believed that a student's shortcomings may not originate in his different ethnic, cultural or economic background, but in his teachers' responses to that background. Stevenson, Stiler, Lee, Lucker, Kitamura,

and Hsu (1985) report that achievement differences among American, Japanese and Chinese students are not due to differences in cognitive ability, but to other factors found in the school and home. They suggest that we search for more subtle factors in the home or school which may lead to higher achievement.

Braun (1976) asserts that the teacher is without question the key to a successful classroom learning experience. He adds that acceptance of this statement is no longer confined to the pages of educational literature; its full impact is evidenced in the mounting allocation of funds for teacher improvement. Evidence indicates a link between teacher expectations and student academic achievement (Braun, 1986; Dusek, 1975; Good, 1987). This link has important implications for minority group and poor children. Since many middle class teachers may be convinced (often subconsciously) that such students have intellectual limitations, they may somehow convey their limited expectations to the children, thus getting from them the little that they expect (Papilia & Olds, 1992). Most of the research in this area has focused on the majority population (Good, 1987; Dusek & Joseph,

1983; Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1974). Thus, research on minority populations is scarce, especially on Mexican-Americans (Dusek & Joseph, 1983).

It is important to consider teacher expectations and Mexican-Americans for various reasons. In the United States' education system, the Mexican-American has historically been associated with the low-achieving status of the lower class minorities (Sue & Sue, 1990). According to Arbona (1990), they are one of the fastest growing, largest and youngest minority groups in the United States. She found that the Mexican settlement in the United States dates back two centuries, to when the Mexicans inhabited what today is known as the Southwestern United States, lost to the United States in colonial wars. Compared to the majority population, Mexican-Americans are still disadvantaged in terms of educational and occupational attainment. Furthermore, Arbona (1990), Cervantes (1988), Delgado-Gaitan (1988) indicate that 40 to 50 percent of Mexican-American students drop out before they complete high school. This is more than double the rate for blacks, and three times higher than for the white students (Sue & Sue, 1990). Exactly how many of these students are recent

immigrants and how many are native born U.S. citizens is unknown, but we do know that a large population remains undereducated and undervalued. (Mexican-American is a term that refers to a person whose ancestry can be traced to Mexico.)

Perhaps it is time to focus more on curriculum, learning strategies, teachers' expectations, mentors and academic support systems to improve Mexican-American academic achievement (Strassburger, Rosen, Miller & Chavez, 1990).

In this paper, an examination of teachers' expectations will be reviewed. Teachers' expectations are defined here as inferences that teachers make about future behavior or academic achievement of their students, based upon what they know about these students now. The major effect of teachers' expectations is seen in terms of student outcomes which occur because of the actions that teachers take in response to their own expectations.

Researchers have examined two types of teacher expectation effects (Good, 1987; Brophy & Good, 1974): The *self-fulling prophecy effect* in which an originally erroneous expectation leads to behavior that causes the

expectation to become true, and the *sustaining expectation effect*. In the latter effect, teachers expect students to sustain previously developed behavior patterns, to the point that teachers take these behavior patterns for granted, and fail to see and capitalize on changes in student potential.

Researchers Good (1987) and Brophy (1983) suggest that different types of teachers express high or low expectations in different ways. Some teachers believe that they can and will influence student learning. However, some teachers believe that student intelligence is fixed. Clearly, the research indicates that teachers hold powerful positions, and as a result, have an important influence on the children's achievement.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature will focus on four areas: 1) teachers' attitudes and expectations toward Mexican-American children; 2) teachers' attitudes and expectations toward minority children; 3) teachers' performance expectations of students; and 4) other expectations which determine teacher behavior.

Teachers' Attitudes and Expectations Towards Mexican-Americans

Heller (1966) stated that "school experiences generally tend to leave Mexican-American children with the feeling that it is extremely difficult or impossible for them to acquire status within the school system."

Parsons (1966), in a doctoral dissertation, reports that he found much discrimination against Mexican-Americans in the community and school system. The teachers were all Caucasians and seemed unanimous in sharing the stereotype of Mexican-Americans as being inferior in capacity as well as performance. Sociometric tests indicated that even the Mexican-American children came to share the view constantly held up to them in school that Caucasians are smarter than Mexican-Americans.

Parsons (1966) added that one teacher was so generally prejudiced against Mexican-Americans that she stood up in full view of a group of well-dressed, quietly behaved Mexican-American pupils and described Mexican-Americans as noisy and dirty. Caucasians in the study characterized Mexican-Americans as being

immoral, violent, belligerent, dirty, unintelligent, irresponsible, and lazy.

In 1969, a study by Ulibarri found that teachers in general, were not sensitive to the sociocultural differences of Mexican-American or Caucasian children. While teachers were aware of some obvious differences in language, customs, and experience backgrounds, they were not aware of underlying value conflicts. For example, one study by Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1985) accurately reinterprets Mexican children copying in the classroom as a legitimate activity based upon home socialization patterns that stress collectivity and social cohesiveness, whereas Caucasian teachers often misinterpret Mexican-American copying as a practice characterizing dishonest, lazy, poorly motivated students and indicating low academic ability. It is clear that teachers' expectations may be influenced by the failure to understand value conflicts.

Sebastian (1972) pointed out the obvious lack of an educational program designed to meet the special needs of one group, Mexican-American pupils. She mentions the role of the teacher as critical in developing such programs, and suggests that

understanding of pupils' characteristics which result from ethnic and socioeconomic background, is essential if the teacher is to be prepared to receive and hold Mexican-American children in school.

In one study, Buriel (1983) compared Mexican-American children to Anglo-American children for ethnic differences. He found that 1) Mexican-American children received less teacher affirmation following correct responses than their Anglo-American classmates, and 2) unlike Anglo-Americans, teacher affirmation showed a significant correlation to achievement for Mexican-Americans.

Sebastian (1972) revealed Caucasians' stereotyped views of Mexican-Americans as people who 1) have little interest in education, 2) do not value it highly, and 3) do not support their children's attempts in school.

In contrast, Cummins and Miramontes (1989) found in an ethnographic study, that data did not support the notion that Mexican-American students had cognitive deficiencies, nor the statement that the Mexican-American students were unmotivated and not oriented towards academics, particularly when they left school. The data affirmed that all of the students were

interested in learning about new ideas, and that they liked to read on their own. They all received encouragement from their families to succeed in school. The findings also indicated that the classroom reflected a "skills-based orientation" where basal readers and workbooks predominate and isolated skills are developed devoid of any meaningful context. A deficient perspective was also reflected in the kinds of tasks which students were asked to perform in the classroom (i.e., rote memorization, skill sheets, and focus on workbooks). These tasks reduced the opportunities for students to expand their language and academic development in school.

Sebastian (1972) states that the lack of understanding on the part of teachers, denies equal education opportunity to Mexican-American children, not only in the area of academic achievement, but in the area of affective development. Therefore, it is probable that the most serious harm that comes to the Mexican-American child in school is the psychological damage of being misunderstood and rejected by insensitive teachers and classmates.

Teachers' Attitudes and Expectations Toward Minority Children

Of the various student characteristics that affect teachers' classroom behavior, ethnicity has received the least amount of empirical attention (Buriel, 1983).

In a doctoral dissertation, Espinoza (1975) reports that minority children, like all children, enter school already having acquired considerable knowledge and skills. By the time children enter school, they have learned a language, they have absorbed a culture, and they have gained a sense of values and tradition from their families and communities.

Espinoza (1975) suggests that entrance into public school brings about an abrupt change for all children, but for many minority children, the change is often shattering. The knowledge and skills which they have gained in their early years are regarded as valueless in most of the schools they attend. He adds that generally, minority children are taught by teachers who are Anglo-Americans and uninformed on the culture that minority students bring to school. Most teachers have been trained at institutions staffed by, for the most

part, Anglo-Americans, and their training and practice teaching do little to develop the skills they need to teach minority children.

Espinoza (1975), in a doctoral dissertation, reports that teachers of minority youth need to change their attitudes and expectations. Most of these students have poor self-images that are reinforced by educators in the schools. He adds that most teachers held low levels of expectations for poor children, particularly black ones, and discouraged most of them from ever going on with their education. The lack of a high level of expectation continues to hurt these children psychologically and deprives them of an opportunity to advance educationally, economically and socially in our country.

That social class and race stereotypes may be influential in teacher expectancies, was graphically illustrated in a naturalistic study on black students by Rist (1970). He pointed out that teachers made permanent seating arrangements for kindergarten students on the eighth day of school, based upon four sources of information and observation of students within the classroom setting. It should be noted that

not one of these four sources of information to the teacher was related directly to the academic potential of the incoming kindergarten child. Rather, they concerned various types of social information, revealing such facts as the financial status, medical care of the child, number of siblings, and whether the child lived with both, one or neither of his natural parents.

Rist (1970) reported that expectations of the child's initial teacher, in this case, the kindergarten teacher, resulted in the child remaining in the same expectancy group in grades one and two. He suggested that this was a result of the type of teacher expectation these children received. Children who were dirty, dressed poorly, or had a strong body order, were automatically placed at table three. Those children who closely fit the teacher's "ideal type" of the successful student, were chosen for seats at table one. There was not a clear distinction among the children at the various tables as to the degree of "blackness" of their skin, but there were more children at the third table with very dark skin (five in all) than there were at the first table (three).

Rist (1970) also cites evidence that the teacher establishes differential treatment towards the students, which affects high-status and low-status behavior. High-status students ridicule and belittle lower-status students. Lower-status students respond with hostility or withdrawal. He also reported that students at table three received less teacher instruction and were thus academically less able to achieve. Some students at this table were seated so that they had their backs to the teacher and the blackboard. The classroom interaction established by the teacher, inhibited low-status children from verbalizing what knowledge they had accumulated. They had accumulated knowledge, but they did not have the opportunity to verbalize it.

It appears that ethnicity is not the only factor to be considered when discussing teachers' expectations. Embracing middle class values is also important, since having those values appears to increase a minority child's status.

Teachers' Performance Expectations of Students

It is now widely accepted that teachers form expectancies about student academic ability and social

skills (Braun, 1976; Dusek, 1975). Research indicates that teachers' expectancies are correlated with student achievement test performance (Dusek & O'Connell, 1973). Ultimately, teachers' perceptions about students influence their interactions with them. Inappropriate teacher behavior occurs when teacher perceptions are either inaccurate, or accurate but inflexible.

Brophy and Good (1974) suggested the following model for how the expectation communication process might work in the classroom.

1. Early in the year, teachers form differential expectations for student behavior and achievement.

2. Consistent with these differential expectations, teachers behave differently toward various students.

3. This treatment tells students something about how they are expected to behave in the classroom and perform on academic tasks.

4. If the teacher treatment is consistent over time, and if students do not actively resist or change it, it will likely affect their self-concepts, achievement motivation, levels of aspiration, classroom conduct, and interactions with the teacher.

5. These effects generally will complement and reinforce the teachers' expectations, so that students will come to conform to these expectations, more than they might have otherwise.

6. Ultimately, this will affect student achievement and other outcomes. High-expectation students will be led to achieve at or near their potential, but low-expectation students will not gain as much as they could have gained if taught differently.

Braun (1976) claims that these teacher expectation effects will show up in the achievement tests given at the end of the year, providing support for the self-fulling prophecy.

Findings suggest that teachers form quick judgements about their students, and that they develop clear expectations for the performance of their students early in the year (Brophy & Good, 1974; Brophy, 1983). According to Brophy & Good (1974), this is demonstrated by comments made during interviews on the third day of school, by a group of first grade teachers. The children had not been to kindergarten, had not taken tests, and had not had prior contact with

the teachers. Students' sex, social class and physical attractiveness correlated with teachers' negative prediction about the children's future behavior and academic success.

Research also shows that teachers' performance expectations vary in terms of student characteristics other than achievement potential per se. Brophy and Good (1974) found in one set of classrooms that low-achievement girls tended to have especially impoverished academic environments in the classroom, whereas high-achieving boys tended to be afforded productive and intellectually responsive environments, despite the fact that when general measures of classroom interaction were used, teachers were more critical of boys than girls. Thus, depending upon the questions researchers ask, different relationships can be obtained. Clearly, a teacher may treat girls and boys in the same classroom somewhat differently but still maintain sharply divergent interaction patterns with particular subgroups of student (high-achieving boys versus low-achieving girls).

In one type of experimental study of expectation formation, subjects (not necessarily teachers) are

given only carefully controlled information about, and little or no opportunity to interact with, the "students" (usually fictional) about whom they are asked to make predictions. In such a study, all of the subjects might be given cumulative record forms containing identical test scores, grades and comments, presumably written by previous teachers, but half of the forms would be accompanied by a picture of a black child (to see if knowledge about the fictional students' race would affect predictions about their achievement). Such experiments have shown that expectations can be affected significantly by information about test performance, performance on assignments, track or group placement, classroom conduct, physical appearance, race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sex, speech characteristics, and various diagnostic or special education labels (see reviews by Braun, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1974; Dusek and Joseph, 1983).

Brophy (1983) suggests that teacher expectations can have direct effect on student learning by affecting student opportunities to learn; differences in expectations lead to differences in what is taught,

which in turn, leads to differences in what is ultimately learned.

Other Expectations Which Determine Teacher Behavior

Teachers' expectations about their ability to maintain a positive self-concept is of great importance since this helps determine their ability to fulfill their function properly. Students who interfere with that function are likely to harm their professional self-concept and may experience rejection from their teacher (Itskowitz, Navon, & Strauss, 1989).

Expectations may also come from outside the classroom, such as boards of education, community groups, district administrators, and government agencies.

According to Garcia (1981), contextual considerations may also influence both teacher and student expectations. The two variables are classroom size and differences in student achievement level. These variables create an environment in which poor expectations may be more difficult to alter due to the fact that grouping occurs, and teachers depend more on stereotypes.

Conclusion

The conclusion, based on this research, is that teachers do not expect Mexican-American children or minority children as a group, to excel in school. Faulty teacher perceptions appear to cause disadvantages to ethnic students, because findings indicate that they result in a low-achieving status for the students prior to any objective knowledge. One researcher revealed that teachers of minority children too often imposed their way as the only and best way. They make these children believe that their world outside of school is valueless and that their family, neighbors and communities are also culturally worthless. While being led to believe that their speech, their dress, their food, their customs, and their values are not acceptable, they learn that they themselves are not acceptable (Goldmark, 1971).

The school experience should enhance the students' places in American society, rather than become a negative experience. We must not assume that all Mexican-American children are alike. They should not be mislabeled and placed in remedial classes or special education. In Texas, Mexican-American children are

over-represented by 300 percent in special education programs under the disabilities classification (Sue & Sue, 1990).

The negative experiences that Mexican-American students encounter predispose them to the development of a higher incidence of mental illness and/or emotional disturbances, such as depression, stress disorders, low self-esteem, etc. (Cervantes, 1989).

Another issue of great importance relates to the dual roles that Mexican-American children are playing. They live double lives, existing in a "double bind" situation (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956). Family atmosphere and values are in conflict with the school environment and Caucasian values. By the time that they reach middle school, Mexican-American students often choose to drop out rather than assimilate into an educational system that treats them as inferior.

There is a real danger that the schools will unconsciously bring about personality disorganization in these children (Sebastian, 1972).

School districts appear to lack a commitment to the Mexican-American student. This allows institutional racism and racial biases to flourish.

Mexican-Americans need to be studied separately from other Hispanic groups, since the study of "Hispanics" masks the wide variations that exist among the different Hispanic ethnic groups.

More systematic research is needed to examine teachers' expectations and the double-life expectations which are imposed on the Mexican-American children. In order to develop insight and awareness to counteract the negative expectations of teachers, it is recommended that boards of education, community groups, district administrators and government agencies make a commitment to develop and implement programs that are sensitive to the needs of Mexican-American children.

Teachers need to be trained and made more aware of the vast influence that their attitudes and prejudices have on their pupils. As we see more and more children from the Mexican culture which were born or now reside in our nation, this cannot be stressed enough. In the long run, the payoff is tremendous when we think of the

benefits in terms of more functional and productive citizens.

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